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AME Church and Allen University Announce Partnership with Statewide Reading Initiative Aimed At Improving Student Reading Skills

Collaboration to focus on engaging church and community members in a unified effort to address the issue of poor reading skills and low graduation rate in South Carolina

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Officials with the Seventh Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Allen University, and the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC), today announced a partnership to develop a comprehensive training within the more than 500 South Carolina AME Churches, focused on enhancing reading skills for students.

The partnership includes the AME Church, Allen University and Parents and Adults Inspiring Reading Success (PAIRS), a project of South Carolina's 16 daily newspapers, which is administered by the EOC. PAIRS was launched in February 2005 to help existing groups, organizations and individuals ensure that every child in South Carolina is given the opportunity and the skills to read at the level recommended for his or her grade through one-on-one interaction with parents, mentors and tutors. Research proves there is an almost one-to-one correlation between eighth grade reading proficiency and high school graduation rates.

Key points of the partnership include:

- Development of the Allen University Reading Initiative, which will initiate, support, and evaluate church-based reading programs to enhance the reading proficiency of students in grades one through eight.
- Implementation of the Phase I pilot program in 14 AME churches in Summer 2005.
- Development of "master trainers" who can train others in their communities.
- Integration of a nutrition component to ensure that children are provided health snacks or meals during activities.

"Given the scrutiny currently being placed upon South Carolina's schools, it is important for us all to note that the full measure of students' success should be placed on work done in and out of the classroom," said the Right Reverend Preston Warren Williams II, presiding bishop of the Seventh Episcopal District AME Church.

"We cannot solely place this burden upon teachers," said Allen University President Charles E. Young. "They teach, but we should take a role in reinforcing what they learn."

The partnership will focus on enhancing student reading skills through building adult/child relationships and reinforcing the importance of high achievement.

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“Increasing the reading skills of young people and subsequently increasing our state’s graduation rate to the national level would have an overwhelmingly positive impact on our state’s economy. The partnership we have forged today is a positive step toward achieving so many of the goals we have set for South Carolina,” said Bob Staton, Chairman of the EOC.

“Today is a classic example of what is possible when community leaders come together to address an issue that affects us all. Together, we maximize the potential to make a difference. We are proud to collaborate with the AME Church and Allen University,” said Harold Stowe, EOC member.

The EOC is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected officials who are appointed by legislative leaders and the governor to monitor and review the implementation of the 1998 South Carolina Education Accountability Act, the Education Improvement Act, and the K-12 system.

Founded in 1870 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Allen University is an academic community whose mission is to provide education with a strong commitment to teaching and community service. Allen – the oldest historically Black university in South Carolina to be established by African Americans – is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).